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The Role of Faith in Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution

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THE ROLE OF FAITH IN CROSS-CULTURAL CONFLICT RESOLUTION

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When we speak of the role of faith in cross-cultural conflict resolution, our challenge is to honor the diversity of the world's humanistic and spiritual traditions while seeking common ground among them. What we aspire towards, in other words, is an agenda for research, dialogue and activism that is global in conception and responsive to common challenges of peacemaking and coexistence within and among the world's many traditions. It is no longer sufficient for transnational peace agendas to be defined primarily by the cultural experiences and perceived security threats of a particular nation or culture. We need new frameworks for organizing knowledge about religion, culture and spirituality – frameworks that recognize the powerful role that faith and belief play in conflict and conflict resolution, and that do not privilege one culture as 'normal' and label another as 'exceptional'.

One of the greatest barriers to open dialogue between major cultural traditions is the assumption that a universally valid (and presumably secular) framework of knowledge for peace and the resolution of conflicts already exists. This notion is untenable for two reasons. First, it breeds complacency, lack of vision and reliance on dominant paradigms which presuppose that peace and human development 'take care of themselves' so long as self-interested actors pursue such mundane, minimalist goals as economic growth and physical security.

Second, it is exclusive, and implies that approaches based on non-Western sources, or even religious precepts, for that matter, are dangerous or somehow invalid (Dallmayr 2000). The rising prominence of protracted ethnic and religious conflicts, however, has convinced many scholars that the cultural and religious aspects of conflict and its resolution must be taken seriously. An emerging literature on religion, conflict resolution and peace has contributed significantly to this development.

One of the most important findings of cross-cultural conflict resolution research is that religion is a perennial and perhaps inevitable factor in both conflict and conflict resolution. Religion, after all, is a powerful constituent of cultural norms and values, and because it addresses the most profound existential issues of human life (e.g., freedom and inevitability, fear and faith, security and insecurity, right and

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wrong, sacred and profane), religion is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. To transform the conflicts besetting the world today, we need to uncover the conceptions of peace within our diverse religious and cultural traditions, while seeking the common ground among them.

Defining the Role of Religion in Conflict and Peacemaking

Peace and conflict resolution are both universal and particular; similar as well as divergent approaches derive form and vitality from the cultural resources of a people. When we examine peacemaking and conflict resolution across cultures, we discover both common themes and significant differences, both of which enhance our general theories of conflict resolution and help to create constructive channels for the perennial religious impulse.

Whether or not scholars and practitioners are consciously aware of religious influences in the shaping of their own perceptions, religious belief systems directly impact the development of theories of conflict and conflict resolution. Primarily, this occurs through presuppositions regarding the nature of reality and society, the purpose and ultimate meaning of life, and the means by which to live an 'authentic' ideal life – the life of inner and outer peace. Religious concepts of peace, then, embody and elaborate upon the highest moral and ethical principles of a given society and define the terms and conditions for individual and social harmony.

Religion may be defined as a path of ultimate transformation, comprised of interconnected systems of symbols and guidelines. These shape the individual and group subconscious from which social practices and interactions are all given meaning (Galtung 1997). This common frame of reference underpins the very fabric of group and individual identity, providing the shared normative foundation that makes harmonious social interaction possible as well as meaningful. Social and political norms manifest the virtues, priorities and ideals of their religious culture.

Religion in Conflict Situations

In promulgating the ideals and values held in highest esteem by groups and individuals, religion profoundly influences goal-seeking behavior in conflict situations, by establishing the criteria or frames of reference for determining the rightness and wrongness of events. Viewed from a religious perspective, conflicts are interpreted not only as ruptures in horizontal relationships between human beings, but also as ruptures in one's vertical relationship with the divine.

The 'shared cultural universe' or 'collective cosmology' that religion provides operates at both a conscious and subconscious level, and both levels come into play in the midst of conflict. For disputants, the disruption that accompanies conflict can shake unstated, implicit expectations and reinforce tendencies to frame relationships in terms of religious categories. In this context, religious presuppositions regarding 'self', 'other', 'conflict' and 'peace' emerge, as individuals or groups frame the conflict, give it meaning and fashion responses appropriate to their values and goals for its resolution.

By enjoining a broad repertoire of models or precedents of desirable behavior in conflicted circumstances while specifically admonishing others, religion implicitly influences the desirability and likelihood of certain courses of action over others. When utilized constructively, religion can affect individual and social responses to triggering events through (a) placing the event in a historical, goal-seeking context, (b) providing meaning for events in light of values, goals and religious identity and (c) offering roles for dealing with conflict through appropriate, affirmative responses based on religious precepts and idealized models or precedents. When faced with difficult challenges or uncertainty in conflicts, participants rely on these established codes of conduct to alleviate cognitive dissonance, anxiety and guilt as well as to fashion a path of correctness (based on idealized courses of action) that promises to restore harmony and order.

Religion and Conflict Resolution

It is essential to recognize that the experience of conflict evokes a deep-seated need for affirmation of identity and restoration of meaning. Conflict resolution does more than address material clashes of interest; it speaks to social reintegration, restoration and redemption, existential security, personal transcendence and transformation. These concepts are drawn from the backdrop of the sacred, which may be defined as any process that explicitly connects us to the largest possible context to which we belong (Said, Lerche and Lerche 1995; see also Bateson and Bateson 1987). The affirmation of individual and group identity achieved through redemptive transformation is essential in giving meaning to a conflict and its resolution. Attempts to divorce the spiritual from conflict resolution practices deny an essential component of healing and social restoration that permits conflicts to be *experienced* as resolved.

The religious cosmology of a group, in privileging some values and ideals over others, specifies how restoration, wholeness and healing can be achieved through distinctive paths of resolution adopted by different cultures (Abu-Nimer 1996). Conflict resolution approaches that do not incorporate appropriate and relevant paths of redemptive transformation are less likely to yield more enduring or effective resolution. The ruptures experienced in conflict situations often require symbolic or other social exchange found within collective cosmologies. In this way, conflict resolution strategies manifest distinctive conceptions of peace, which illuminate the terms and conditions necessary for social harmony to be both understood and experienced.

For example, in Christian cosmologies and in some Western approaches to conflict resolution, personal responses such as an aspiration toward transcendence or perceptual transformation are encouraged, emphasizing historical breaks from the past that enable renewal and revisionism. This is in line with Christianity's traditional emphasis on a personal relationship with the divine and the idealized social value attached to the individual pursuit of interests (Tarnas 1991). Significantly, Christianity alone among the monotheist traditions encourages this kind of comprehensive, unilateral conflict resolution approach, whereas in both Islam and Judaism, reciprocal or other social actions signal the achievement of

resolution within a larger, historical context. The role of community and community leaders in achieving historically and communally acceptable solutions is particularly evident in Islamic approaches to conflict resolution.

Islam, Peace and Cross-Cultural Conflict Resolution: A Comparative Perspective

Contemporary frictions between Western and Muslim societies underscore the importance of developing cross-cultural frameworks that highlight inter-religious and faith-based dimensions of conflict resolution. Where poorly managed conflict leads to distortion and failure of communication, cooperative inquiry into traditions of peace and peacemaking helps to establish new points of contact and complementarity across cultures.

For far too long, Western media and scholarship have tended to mirror the unfortunate estrangement between Islamic and Western societies and cultures. Popular as well as academic literatures have focused disproportionately on religious radicalism and militancy, effectively viewing Islam through the lenses of terrorism and violence and neglecting its role as a deeply embedded discourse and affirmative value system in the day-to-day lives of Muslims. Meanwhile, early Muslim admiration for the West's achievements has been tempered by a tendency to filter perceptions through the lenses of colonialism, imperialism and contemporary grievances in the Middle East.

To this day, the presumption of incompatibility has provided the dominant motif for storytelling about Islamic and Western cultures. Both Western observers and Muslims paint with broad brushstrokes when they engage in generalization about macro-cultural units of analysis, and fail to account for the diverse strands of cultural legacies. As protagonists of the story of incompatibility, they often resort to a language of exclusivity. This language is preoccupied with defining boundaries, and manifests a retreat from intercultural experiences to psychological and cultural segregation. Implicitly or explicitly, the 'other' is depicted as a threatening monolith.[1] The result is that Muslim and Western analysts have placed such strong emphasis on extremist tendencies among their purported adversaries that a 'clash of symbols' has begun to emerge, in which the most superficial and eye-catching aspects of the 'other' are highlighted at the expense of shared and convergent values.

To transcend the 'clash of symbols', Muslims and Westerners must aspire to know one another within a new context of sustained, dialogical engagement. Dialogue can enable Muslims to respond more substantively to the innovations of the West, while also making it possible for Westerners to appreciate Islamic conceptions of peace and thereby transcend the habit of focusing narrowly on those groups of Muslims that are responsible for destructive acts or confrontational rhetoric.

Contrasting Western and Islamic Approaches to Peace

Although Western approaches to peace reflect traditions within Christian religious cosmology, most are underpinned by largely secular intellectual constructs. In the field of international relations, the prevailing Western approach is apparent in an emergent synthesis of neorealist power politics and neoliberal institutionalism. Considered separately from justice, peace is equated with an absence of war; justice, in turn, is understood as an absence of gross violations of human rights. As an absence of war or organized violence, peace is maintained by the threat of coercion and by institutionalized cooperation among great powers. Peace is equated with stability and order guaranteed by hegemonic influence. Where institutionalized order cannot be guaranteed, as in politics among core and peripheral nation-states, preponderance of coercive power is viewed as a necessary, albeit arbitrary, arbiter of intractable disputes.

In its defense of the contemporary world order, the dominant approach to peace in international relations reflects the modern Western tendency to think about peace and conflict resolution in terms of rational order or problem solving predicated upon reason and expediency. Following the example of such Greek thinkers as Plato and Euripides, modern Western thinking regards reason as sacred. Passion has been posited as the opponent of reason (hence the putatively dispassionate quality of serious intellectual inquiry); passion is dangerous and destructive. Emmanuel Kant (1723-1804), for example, understood history as progress toward rationality (Reiss 1991).[2] While it is true that modern advocates of *realpolitik* have disregarded Kant's optimistic rationalism, they have not rejected the underlying assumption that peace can only reign if reason continues to achieve triumphal victories in an ongoing war against passion – for example, against tribalism, ethnic conflict and ideologically based competition. In the past, Islamic civilization has sometimes been framed as inimical to this Western ethos, and as an 'exception' to natural processes of development and progressive, peaceful change.

Not surprisingly, the conception of peace that is dominant among Western elites differs markedly from Islamic conceptions. Historically, Islamic thinkers benefited from and even extended the thought of the Greeks, but speculative thought never dissociated itself from religious precepts and values. Moreover, most Muslim thinkers were reluctant to imitate the Greek inclination to sanctify reason while denigrating passion. Reason was seldom regarded as sacred in its own right, nor was passion viewed solely as a source of disruption and injustice. The general tendency was to view reason and passion as complementary aspects of the human being that can be integrated through the faith and practice of Islam, active submission to the divine. Such an integration is suggested by the Qur'anic ideal of *nafs al-mutma'inna,* the "soul at peace" (Qur'an, 89:27), in which deeply held values, conscience, and desire are in harmony.[3]

Like Christians, Jews and followers of other traditions, Muslims share in a common calling to work for peace. This calling is rooted in the *Qur'an*, which enjoins humanity to "strive as in a race in all virtues" (Qur'an, 5:48). Within the Muslim community, or *umma*, this calling has manifested, and will no doubt continue to manifest, in varied ways that reflect continuous efforts to interpret and

apply foundational Islamic values in specific historical, social and cultural situations. Islam, like all religions, is not only a theological affirmation but also a living historical process with multiple syntheses and expressions that must be taken into account. Though in principle we may speak of Islam as an integral tradition, from a practical, realistic standpoint there are many Islams, each of which reflects a different approach to perennial challenges of integrating precept and practice. Through its varied traditions, Islam has much to contribute to intercultural and inter-religious dialogue on the advancement of peace and related humanistic and spiritual values (Said, Funk and Kadayifci 2001).

Practices of Islamic societies, of course, have often reflected those aspects of the prevailing Western approach to peace that call for coercive power, particularly through an emphasis on the role of centralized authority in checking centrifugal forces of rebellion and fragmentation. Nonetheless, Islamic norms have long rendered a minimalist approach to issues of peace and justice questionable in its religious legitimacy. Ever since Muslims first assembled themselves in political community, they have believed that a society guided by inspired laws, wise leadership and extensive consultation is superior to a society governed by the arbitrary whims of a king, dictator or oligarchy. Islam puts little faith in ideas such as the 'invisible hand', and enjoins the proactive establishment of peace through a just social order. Peace is understood to imply not only an *absence* of oppression and tumult, but also a *presence* of justice and conditions for human flourishing.

As Muslim jurists developed the *shari'a*, or law of Islam, they responded both to the demands of governing a new empire, and to the abuse of power by caliphal authority. Many *shari'a* provisions, such as the rules of evidence, were understood as a protective code, ensuring that believers would be able to pursue the good life (*hayy tayyiba*) without fear. While Muslim thinkers have given consideration to the same types of dilemmas that have preoccupied Hobbes and Locke, Islamic aspirations have long reflected a broad and holistic conception of peace.[4] This conception is premised on the *Qur'an* and *Sunnah* (the example of the Prophet).

The keynote of the Qur'anic revelation could be characterized as integration and wholeness through surrender to God. This essential theme is expressed in a universalistic spirit, suggesting a worldview premised on tolerance and inclusiveness (Qur'an, 49:13). Peace in Islam begins with God; God *is* peace, for peace (*al-Salam*) is one of the "most beautiful names" of God (Qur'an, 59:23-24). Peace in the world reflects higher realities. In the *Qur'an*, peace is affirmed as the greeting, language, and condition of Paradise (Qur'an, 10:10, 14:23, 19:61-63, 36:58). God calls believers unto the abode of peace (*dar al-salam*) (Qur'an, 10:25), and the yearning for peace derives from the innermost nature of humankind. Interestingly enough, the word *Islam* derives not from the name of a particular prophet or people, but from the same root as *salam* (*s-l-m*) and suggests a condition of peace, security, wholeness and safety from harm that is attained through surrender (*taslim*) to the Divine.

Peace, then, occupies a central position among Islamic precepts, where it is closely linked to justice and human flourishing. Peace in Islam suggests a condition of principle-based order – a proper equilibrium of parts – from which a pattern of harmony can emerge. This condition is both internal and external; upholding it is

the responsibility of every Muslim. The term *jihad*, often translated superficially as "holy war", actually means striving, and the "greater jihad" (*al-jihad al-akbar*) in the Islamic tradition has always been the inner struggle to purify the self and behave in a manner which furthers rather than disrupts the divine harmony.

Islam adopts a positive view of human nature, insisting that the original human constitution (*fitrah*) is good and *muslim* in character. There is no conception of original sin, but rather a hopeful conception of human potential that is integrally related to a status of stewardship towards creation. In contrast to the Western idea of free choice and freedom from constraint ('freedom to do'), Islam accentuates existential freedom ('freedom to be'). The dignity of the individual is actualized through service, within a broader context of human solidarity.

There is a clearly articulated preference in Islam for nonviolence over violence, and for forgiveness (*'afu*) over retribution. The *Qur'an* aims to regulate the commonplace, retributive responses of people to conflict and violence. Forgiveness is consistently held out as the preferred option for humanity in matters of requiting clear injustice or crime. *"The recompense of an injury is an injury the like thereof; but whoever forgives and thereby brings about a reestablishment of harmony, his reward is with God; and God loves not the wrongdoers*" (Qur'an, 42:40). Neither naive pardon nor a mechanical retribution is urged; what is sought is a reformation or moral good accomplished by sincere forgiveness.

Finally, the *Qur'an* frequently cautions people against going to excess when attempting to pursue rights or correct injustice. The *Qur'an* discourages unnecessary conflict, and heaps utter condemnation on those who, by selfishly pursuing their own limited goals, bring destruction, oppression and violence (*fitnah*) down upon the rest of their fellows, "committing excesses on earth" (Qur'an, 5:33).

A Communally Embedded Approach to Conflict Resolution

From an Islamic point of view, the achievements of the dominant Western approach to peace are impressive, but also one-sided. From a Muslim perspective, the Western approach puts too much faith in institutional formulas and the "invisible hand" of competition, and too little emphasis on communal cooperation in the conscious pursuit of values. Where the Western approach celebrates human self-determination, the Islamic perspective underscores divine purpose and human exertion. While the Western approach points to political pluralism, individual rights and consumerism as the substance of peace, the Islamic perspective affirms cultural pluralism, communal solidarity, social justice and faith.

The differences between Western and Islamic approaches to conflict resolution mirror some of the differences between Western and Islamic perspectives on peace. Modern Western traditions view conflict as natural and potentially even creative (in ideas ranging from 'natural selection' and 'creative destruction' to 'nonviolent conflict transformation'), despite its potential conduciveness to instability and disorder. While professionals and scholars who *specialize* in conflict resolution abjure attempts to merely suppress conflict and encourage the brokering of durable, mutually beneficial resolutions to problems (Fisher, Ury and Patton 1991), the

prevailing inclination is to permit open confrontation among conflicting interests without necessarily seeking a 'win-win' solution or recourse to religious values.

While conflict resolution specialists have begun to develop newer approaches in order to prioritize human needs and non-adversarial processes (Burton 1990; Laue 1988), Western conflict resolution has traditionally reflected a cultural outlook of pragmatic individualism and a style of instrumental problem-solving (Scimecca 1991). This outlook has been associated with an emphasis on expediency and technique. From an Islamic standpoint, it can be criticized as an engineering approach that neglects relationships while focusing on isolated issues or on variables that can be manipulated mechanistically.

However suitable modern Western techniques may be in their original cultural milieu – especially when harmonized with religious or humanistic values – their applications in more traditional or non-Western contexts are circumscribed. John Paul Lederach (1995), for example, has observed substantial differences between contemporary Western conflict resolution approaches and traditional Latin American approaches that are derived from indigenous culture and embedded in communal realities. On the basis of his work in the region, Lederach (1995) concludes that 'insider partial' mediators – who are by definition well versed in local cultural meanings and expectations, and often have vested interests in conflict outcomes – have better chances of making important contributions than mediators who play the North American role of the disinterested, impartial outsider (see also Wehr and Lederach 1993). Other scholars have also recognized the role that culture plays in conflict and peacemaking, and have affirmed the potential contributions of diverse religious institutions and principles to conflict resolution within divided societies (Augsburger 1992; Avruch 1998).

While the strongest current of the Western approach to conflict resolution prioritizes problems to be abstracted and solved, distinctively Islamic approaches resemble other non-Western approaches insofar as they frame conflicts as matters of communal and not just individual concern, and underscore the importance of repairing and maintaining social relationships. Muslim approaches to conflict resolution draw on religious values, social networks, rituals of reconciliation (Irani and Funk 1998) and historical practices of communal and inter-communal coexistence. Strong emphasis is placed on linkages between personal and group identity, between individual and collective responsibility for wrongdoings, and between attentiveness to 'face'-related issues (public status, shame, reputation for generosity) and the achievement of restorative justice within a context of continuing relationship. Conflict resolution efforts are directed toward the maintenance of communal or intercommunal harmony. They favor recognition of mutual rights and obligations, and uphold shared values by calling for public apology, compensation for losses and forgiveness (Irani and Funk 1998). Conflict resolution mechanisms are legitimized and guaranteed by communal leaders and (traditionally) elders who facilitate a process of reconciliation. History is regarded as a source of stability and guidance that provides lessons for shaping a common future for the society. Efforts aim to protect and empower families and the community as a whole to participate in a resolution process.

Islam and the West: A Search for Common Ground

Discussion of Islamic conceptions of peace and conflict resolution leads quite naturally to the question of Islamic political activism. Contemporary Islamic activism is best understood not as a backward-looking rejection of the modern world, but rather as a deeply felt expression of cultural identity and a critique of domestic as well as international political orders (Falk 1997; Salla 1997).[5] Islam provides its adherents with a language that addresses all aspects of life, and Islamic activism equips Muslims with a vocabulary through which they may affirm their identity and project themselves politically.

One distinction that many observers of Islam fail to make concerns the difference between revivalism and fundamentalism. *Islamic revivalism* is a broad-based social and political movement directed toward internal renewal. First and foremost, it is a response to a widely felt malaise that has left Muslim societies weak and unable to meet the modern world on their own terms. Although its manifestations are remarkably widespread, Islamic revivalism is not a monolithic movement, nor is it equivalent to the militant *fundamentalism* – a reaction to foreign incursions and perceived threats to identity and security – that captures the attention of the media. Among the world's major historical powers, only the Muslims, as a people, have not reversed the decline in their global status. The Japanese, the Chinese and the Europeans have all regained their world influence. The Islamic revival is a way that Muslims are defining who they are. Under conditions of cultural, economic and political marginalization, large numbers of people are returning to deeply embedded religious discourses as they search for authentic values and alternative means of responding to their problems.

All too often, differences between Islamic and Western concepts and values are either over-represented or under-represented. When they are over-represented, the result is the traditional 'incompatibility' story, in which dialogue between the West and Islam is portrayed as an exercise in futility. In large part to counteract this story, a second story – the story of compatibility – has also been told, identifying genuine similarities but sometimes seeking to subsume Islamic precepts within a Western framework. A third story – a story of intercultural complementarity and reconciliation, we hope – has yet to be written. Nonetheless, we would like to suggest a possible script for this new narrative.

Because Islamic traditions provide a set of powerful political precepts and practices with universal implications, Islam can make important contributions to an integrated world order that affirms the unique value of all cultural traditions. In particular, Islam prescribes a strong sense of community and solidarity of people: it postulates a collaborative concept of freedom; and it demystifies the Western myth of triumphant material progress and development. Moreover, Islamic precepts offer strongly affirmative statements on the subject of cultural pluralism.

In the Western pluralistic tradition, diversity is seen in terms of the coexistence of political systems and ideas but not of cultures. Cultural pluralism has roots in an Islamic tradition of ethnic diversity that historically fostered a tendency toward cultural broadness and flexibility. This heritage has allowed autonomous non-Muslim cultures to flourish within Islam to this day, while the West succumbed

to the destruction of native cultures and to sporadic, but virulent, anti-Semitism (Mazrui 1997). While Muslim practice has often fallen short of Muslim principles and the advent of the nation-state has created new tensions between national and sub-national identities, the religion of Islam is remarkable for its explicit precepts favoring cultural and religious pluralism (Qur'an, 2:256, 5:48, 10:47, 49:13, 109:6).

Today's challenge for the West is to live up to its liberal tradition, which requires continual openness to new revelations of truth. Today's challenge for Muslims is no more than the expansion of the original ideas of Islam. A retreat to a cultural ghetto by any group, be it Muslim, Jewish, Christian, Buddhist or Hindu, is not only a denial of the rich diversity of the modern cultural experience, but also a rejection of responsibility for future generations. Retreat is one of two faces of fundamentalism, which we define as a pathology of culture that arises when a group takes a subset of the basic tenets of a tradition and – either under the pressure of insecurity (in the case of today's Muslims) or in the pursuit of hegemony and total security (in the case of the West) – uses them to seal off others or to maintain dominance. Islamic fundamentalism involves a militantly political re-appropriation of religious precepts; Western political fundamentalism is characterized by the canonization and propagation of an exclusive cultural and political narrative.

Popular slogans to the contrary, Islam and the West are not inherently incompatible. The first story – the 'incompatibility' story of many political and strategic analyses – informs us of tensions that do in fact exist, but it neglects the deep resonances between Islamic and Western civilizations that are cited by the reformers and specialists who narrate the second story. The third story exists only in the form of a working outline; we have attempted here to suggest the contents of future narratives that draw lessons from ongoing dialogue.

The third story points to the prospect of a cooperative, nonadversarial relationship between Islamic and Western civilizations. Such a relationship would be premised not on ideas of cultural triumphalism, but on mutual respect and openness to cultural eclecticism. Muslims and Westerners can learn from each other and cooperate in the pursuit of humane values. Seeming contradictions will have to be dealt with on a higher plane. If Western individualism is to bring lasting happiness to the individual, new models of 'free community' will have to be explored; if Muslim ideals of community are to reach their fulfillment, it will be necessary to revisit traditions that underscore the dignity of the individual. Muslims can benefit from the Western experience with political pluralism, and Westerners can benefit from the spirit of Islamic cultural pluralism.

All who identify with Islam and with the West can become co-authors of a new story. We need a new story to tell, and the story we begin to tell today has a bearing on the story we will tell tomorrow. We are all heirs of the story of conflict. If we leave aside tired generalizations and seek to know one another, we can become the architects of a truly new order of cooperation.

Conclusion: The Changing Context of Human Spirituality

We stand at the conjunction of two perspectives. One is the emotional perspective felt by many Westerners – the view that, if not for the revival and

increasing political activism of non-Western cultural traditions such as Islam, all would have been well. This perspective points to the calamitous events of September 11, 2001 and states that its peace has been shattered. The other perspective – a perspective of hopelessness that is common among Muslims as well as members of many other non-Western cultural traditions – is born of experiences of exclusion, suffering and resentment that have accumulated over a considerable period of time. From their perspective, peace and justice have long been absent from the world. A precarious and even humiliating state of existence has been the norm, not peace.

Where do we go from here? What contribution can faith make to this state of affairs? We need to experience ourselves in relationship, not out of relationship. In a world of collapsing boundaries, cultures need to experience their commonality. This is necessary if the suffering that Americans and Westerners are undergoing in the face of scourges like terrorism is to find its counterpoint in the suffering of those who turn to militant belief systems or who are unable to prevent their companions from doing so.

In other words, divergent worlds of perception – Islam and the West, the South and the North – must move from isolation toward unity. To do so, we need to stimulate reflection, find meaning in mutual tragedies and share our most sacred values, including our conceptions of peace. Such activities permit a search for meaning and commonality. The discovery of commonality, in turn, makes reconciliation possible, through the re-identification and reaffirmation of the core spiritual precepts upon which our religious narratives, images and values have been built. In the process, we may also derive common responses to shared human suffering.

While we in no way wish to denigrate traditional religious commitments, we believe that, at the present juncture of human development, it is useful to make a distinction between spirituality and religion, even though the terms are often used interchangeably because both refer to matters of faith. The term *religion* refers to an institutional framework within which a specific theology is pursued, usually among a community of like-minded believers. *Spirituality*, on the other hand, transcends the boundaries of religion, suggesting broader human involvement that comes from the inner essence of a person. At the level of the individual, it refers to action borne of a deep commitment that is not necessarily derived from allegiance to a particular religion.

In conclusion, we affirm that achieving a unifying global consensus as the basis for a humane, ecologically viable, new global system is possible. The essence of such a vision must be felt as well as rationally argued, because it involves both the head and the heart. From this perspective, a new global system requires new political and social arrangements, a new (or renewed) vision of humankind's existential reality and purpose, and an unrelenting effort to make the former truly reflect the latter. This is an agenda for conflict resolution that is worthy of the best in human nature and experience.

Endnotes

1. When we speak of Islam and the West, we need to raise the following questions: Which Islam and which West are we discussing? How are we representing the West (geographically as well as culturally and intellectually)? Who represents the "West"? Is the development of the West a finished product, or is the West still developing? Furthermore, what are we representing as Islam? Who represents "Islam"? Is Islam a static set of authoritative cultural norms, or is Islam a dynamic, spiritual response to life based on essential precepts?

2. Hegel also saw history as a grand unfolding of reason.

3. In the words of Mona Abul-Fadl (1987), "it is *wajh Allah*, the Countenance of Allah, which [the sincere Muslim] seeks.... The serene and contented self, *al Nafs al Radiya al Mardiya,* and the self which has found its innermost sense of peace, *al Nafs al Mutma'inna,* are anchored in that infinite and unassailable source from which they draw" (p. 25).

4. From the beginning, Islamic rule was expected to have a *contractual* basis. The sovereign was to exercise power representing both the will of the community and the traditions of the Prophet. After experiences with political turmoil, *de facto* monarchy, and invasion, some Muslim thinkers began to preoccupy themselves with duties of obedience to a sovereign who fulfilled certain basic minimum requirements with respect to the *Shari'a*.

5. Falk unequivocally defends the right of Muslims to equitable participation *as Muslims* in the contemporary world order, and suggests that contemporary Islamic movements manifest resistance to cultural as well as political marginalization. Michael Salla has advanced a similar argument. Salla suggests that there is a need to move beyond both stereotypical 'essentializations' and fragmentary models based on historical contingency, toward representations of Islam as a discourse that critiques the dominant liberal democratic paradigm in a manner similar to many other religious discourses.

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